Preamble:

We will all be aware of the disturbing events that happened last week. I thought this would be an opportunity to talk about how the media handled the event. I alerted the class that we will spend about half an hour talking about these events so those too distressed could turn up later, but if anyone wants to leave now that is also OK – and I’m sure we all understand and empathize.

There are also some here who are not enrolled but who are interested in discussions of journalism – so we’ll take a brief break before we get back to our discussion of the Fourth Estate which was scheduled for today.

I will work my way through these points, then open up for discussion. I’ll also post this in the Modules if you want to listen/watch/follow up on the embedded links.

For an overall discussion on the Sunday following, this between Jim Mora and Colin Peacock listen to Mediawatch (Radio New Zealand)

<https://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/mediawatch/audio/2018686933/social-media-feels-the-heat-on-hate-after-crisis-in-christchurch>

What are the issues that arise in considering the media covered the mosque killings? I raise 4 or 5 here.

* The framing of the event: remember we talked last week about newsworthiness, news values – the atrocity that was the attack clearly is highly newsworthy and exhibits many of the news values we discussed. We also discussed agenda setting, gate keeping and framing - whereas agenda setting tells us what to think about, framing tells us how to think about it. I did mention last week, when a momentous event occurs, the shock can almost lead to a vacuum of understanding which is when journalism steps in offering various frames through which we interpret an event. The MSM in this instance has following the PM in her framing of the event, as an absolute atrocity, that ‘you are us’ – a call for unity and inclusion. Whereas few will be justifying the event in any conceivable ways, other frames no doubt do exist one of them expressed by the Australian politician Fraser Anning. I don’t want to repeat his words here particularly - and maybe now he is more famous for being egged.
* One of the 10 characteristics of journalism we discussed was to be representative. “Journalism’s value depends on a completeness and proportionality of the information it reports on - in which the significant is given greater visibility than the trivial. Keeping news in proportion is a cornerstone of truthfulness. **Inflating events for sensation, neglecting others, stereotyping, or being disproportionately negative all make, so needs to include all affected communities, not just those with attractive demographics. The most complete stories take into account diverse backgrounds and perspectives**.”

So I think we could say that NZ media failed in this regard. It became clear that there had been very little media interaction with the Muslim community. What were the consequences of that? Little access on the ground, and on any information about the degree of racism that preceded this attack. There was a scramble to find appropriate spokespeople. It could have been that members of the community would have been reluctant to speak about the harassment they faced, but it should have been the responsibility for journalists to ensure their voices were heard. This raises issues about diversity within journalism too – if there had been more people of Muslim backgrounds in the newsroom, would the connections been closer?

So post-event, we do get more commentary, like from Donna Miles-Mojab, a Christchurch Muslim freelance writer and Faisal Halabi, now in London.

<https://www.newsroom.co.nz/2019/03/16/491468?slug=why-did-we-ignore-islamophobia&amp;preview=1>

<https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/17-03-2019/what-does-it-mean-to-be-muslim-in-new-zealand/>

* Another issue is how to deal sensitively with those that are traumatized. We are witnessed over the last week, journalists approaching those in mourning who have often spoken with dignity and openness and we’ve heard journalists struggling with their own emotion – which is something that journalists often have to do. Obviously in this instance, in the case of war correspondents – but also those that deal with stories that involve the police, the court system, family welfare, and health issues.

Mediawatch singles out a few journalists that handled this well, including Newshub’s Thomas Mead (at 4.30 mins in)

<https://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/mediawatch/audio/2018686933/social-media-feels-the-heat-on-hate-after-crisis-in-christchurch>

Here we see Thomas handling the interview in a sensitive manner and by explicitly showing his concern, he felt confident that the subject wanted to keep speaking.

* Another issue is how to provide the public with necessary information without feeding the cause, in this instance, of white supremacy. The phrase is often ‘sunlight not oxygen’.

As we all know now, the alleged attacker broadcast footage of the massacre live on Facebook, a 17-min rampage captured by a head-mounted camera and posted his so-called manifesto on Twitter, regurgitating neo-Nazi in-jokes, memes and immigration conspiracy theories about birth rates and white genocide. One of the most heart-breaking stories is a son forcing himself to watch this as his father was at the mosque which I can only imagine.

Whitney Phillips at the Data and Society Research Institute wrote a report on the interplay between extremists, technology and journalism which could be useful for those interested. He talks about how journalists and the general public, through reposting, need to restrain our instinct to recirculate and glamourize which gives such individuals the ‘oxygen of amplification’. Violent language and memes Phillips says are inherently contagious.

Our media did not handle this very well, with Mora and Peacock discussing The Herald’s choice to stream the live video of the terrorist attack (Mediawatch 7.30 - 9.15).

<https://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/mediawatch/audio/2018686933/social-media-feels-the-heat-on-hate-after-crisis-in-christchurch>

One way of ‘disinfecting through sunlight’ is to stick to facts – for example statistics show that 73% of all extremist killings are from the right wing; 23% from Salafi jihadism, and 3% from the Left. Pointing out those patterns does not ‘feed oxygen to the sources; it subjects them to the disinfecting power of sunlight’. We can only have an honest analysis of the sources of this violence if we understand how it grows and spreads.

* Another critically important issue that involves journalism explicitly is its interface with technology. In this case, the footage of the rampage stopped only after Facebook was contacted by the New Zealand police. Whenever terrorists rely, as was the case in Chch, on the Internet to amplify the effects of their terror, some inevitably defend social media as no better and no worse than the humanity that uses it. Don’t blame the hammer, we are told; blame the hand. At best, that is a deflection. And the streaming of the attacker’s video on the mainstream media means it was readily picked up and amplified by Facebook and Google, given their algorithms read the media logos printed on the footage as meaning the material had been vetted.

<https://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/mediawatch/audio/2018686933/social-media-feels-the-heat-on-hate-after-crisis-in-christchurch> (Mediawatch, iTalk CNN 10.00 – 13.00.

<https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/on-the-inside/385167/paul-buchanan-new-zealand-must-own-this-terrorist-attack>

<https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/20-03-2019/the-christchurch-terrorism-conspiracy-theories-are-not-just-false-theyre-dangerous/>

Once again, Facebook finds itself scrambling to explain how it will prevent its creations from being used for harm. In a statement, Mia Garlick, of Facebook New Zealand, said, “Our hearts go out to the victims, their families and the community affected by this horrendous act. New Zealand Police alerted us to a video on Facebook shortly after the livestream commenced and we quickly removed both the shooter’s Facebook and Instagram accounts and the video.”

The company did not create the root cause—what the scholar Thomas Rid [calls](https://twitter.com/RidT/status/1106562419483119616) a “violent transnational neo-fascist ideology”—but the technology has multiplied its force to a degree that is almost beyond measure. They have subsequently taken down 1.5 million copies, but there are still 100,000s ‘at large’.

Several mainstream media outlets also named the alleged killer very quickly shortly after the event, which meant people of course googled him, and sought him out, which is what he wants as this could encourage others who share his alt-right and white supremacist beliefs. I have to say it has been a relief since them with very little information, at least in this country, about him. Jacinda Ardern’s decision not to utter his name sets a precedent and as I speak, there is debate going on about whether he should be tried in a closed court. Again, this has implications for journalists. If he is tried in an open court, how should journalists report his so-called defense? How would journalists balance a need for information without amplifying his cause?

I also paste in here a good article by Duncan Grieve, founder of The Spinoff, who happened to be an a internet conference attended by Facebook, Google and the like who addresses some of the issues.

<https://thespinoff.co.nz/society/16-03-2019/the-atrocity-profits/>

And a few more links here on these issues

<https://www.bellingcat.com/news/rest-of-world/2019/03/15/shitposting-inspirational-terrorism-and-the-christchurch-mosque-massacre/>

<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/how-to-talk-about-the-new-zealand-massacre-more-sunlight-less-oxygen>

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/111332386/in-the-wake-of-christchurch-mosque-shooting-we-must-examine-the-internet-and-ourselves>

* Close to today’s lecture, another issue is the media’s role as the Fourth Estate – ‘holding truth to power’. As many point out now, our intelligence agencies such as the SIS and GCSB (part of the very powerful Five Eyes network, the intelligence-sharing group developed post-war that links US, UK, Canada, Australia and NZ that Edward Snowden exposed as conducting massive mass surveillance) appears to have failed us. Given the enormous budget and surveillance powers of the 5 Eyes, why was the Government and the media not more aware of the threats? Is it that the agencies shelter behind ideas of ‘national security’ and despite having so much information about all of us, rarely give us any information about themselves? A substantial report recently made no mention of white supremicists and neo-nazis. I think we need to ask why not? And why were they not mentioned? As has been revealed now, the Islamic Women’s Council has been attempting to alert many different, and relevant, Government agencies for years about the rising threat of White supremacism – nothing effective was done by these agencies who are meant to protect all NZers. Why had no journalists followed up their concerns? It appears the agencies were so busy attempting to prevent Jihadi attacks that they ignored the far-right supremicists. Or they and other Govt agencies had been surveilling members of Greenpeace, the Green Party, even those angry about the failure of the Chch rebuild and those damaged by abuse in state care. Does this mean they are racist? Possibly. Could they be influenced by their US Five Eyes partners, including the major power of the US and the hostility that some in the US express opening towards people from Muslim majority countries? Possibly. Should heads roll. Possibly. All questions journalist now must ask.

<https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/national/385050/christchurch-terror-attacks-critics-condemn-spy-agencies-surveillance-strategy>

<https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12213143>

* Finally we have the role of the commentators, and even politicians, some of whom have perpetuating right-wing ideologies that many believe feed and enable such horrendous acts. Their presence in our mediascape and their role intersects with an important debate that has been raging about ‘free-speech’ and de-platforming. I’m sure many of you remember the eruption last year with the planned visit of right-wing Canadian ideologues (Lauren Southern and Stefan Molyneux); the refusal of the mayor Phil Goff to allow them to speak on Auckland Council facilities; the banning of Don Brash from Massey University; the controversies over the recent visit of Jordan Peterson, the Canadian academic who along with his ‘life style tips’ has expressed deeply homophobic and anti-feminism positions.

There are two sides to this debate of course – one that it is necessary to have free speech and that actions, rather than words, are the problem. This is largely the position held by those of the right-wing, and libertarians (arguing against state control, regulations and so forth). Some, like David Farrar, argue that not allowing such voices to be heard forces them underground into the Dark Web and onto sites like 8-chan which are less mainstream. A few on the Left such as Chris Trotter agree with the ‘free speech’ position, arguing that if banning voices occurs that it will be the Left that will be hit hardest. However, this is a position in progressive communities that has faded and I imagine these events will cause further shrinkage.

The media of course is directly involved in reporting publicizing such talks, giving them ‘oxygen’. While prominent visitors should most likely have some media coverage, how they are covered varies a great deal. Many are let off the hook at their actual ideas not sufficiently interrogated (IMO). And we have of course our own crop of right-wing commentators who have been associated with anti-migrant sentiments.

Some of these NZ commentators have quietly removed offensive posts but with commenting or justifying or being held accountable for these posts.

Here is a good blog about these issues:

<https://discrepancie.wordpress.com/2019/03/15/hatred-and-responsibility-a-tale-of-two-twitter-headers/> (Neal Curtis)

And another article by Duncan Grieve of the Spinoff:

<https://thespinoff.co.nz/media/19-03-2019/the-quiet-deletion-of-the-islamophobic-archives/>